

Guidelines on Academic Preparation for State Assessments

The best academic preparation for state assessments is good instruction. This can be broadly defined as instruction in the content specified in California's academic content standards, employing the instructional principles and practices set forth in the content-area frameworks. It is the standards and frameworks, not the tests, that guide instructional programs. Instructional programs are designed to ensure that students master the standards at their own and earlier grade levels. Instructional programs also ensure that students are able to demonstrate mastery of the content standards in multiple formats; for example, multiple choice, short answer, and essay.

Statement of Regulation

Appropriate academic preparation for state assessments must be designed to allow students a fair opportunity to prepare academically while ensuring that such preparation does not invalidate test results.

Regarding advance preparation for state tests, the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5*, Section 854 (a) states:

Except for materials specifically included within the designated achievement test, no program or materials shall be used by any school district or employee of a school district that are specifically formulated or intended to prepare pupils for the designated achievement test. No administration or use of an alternate or parallel form of the designated test for any stated purpose shall be permitted for any pupils in grades 2 through 11, inclusive.

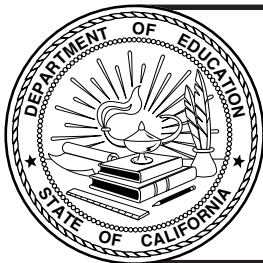
This regulation is based on the California *Education Code*, Section 60611, which prohibits "any program of specific preparation for the statewide pupil assessment program or a particular test used therein."

The Standards for *Educational and Psychological Testing*, also states, "the integrity of test results should be maintained by eliminating practices designed to raise scores without improving performance on the construct or domain being tested" (Standard 15.9).

Further, the National Research Council, in *High Stakes Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation* (1999), recommends that "all students are entitled to sufficient test preparation so their performance will not be adversely affected by unfamiliarity with item format or by ignorance of appropriate test-taking strategies. Test users should balance efforts to prepare students for a particular test format against the possibility that excessively narrow preparation will invalidate test outcomes."

Determining Appropriate Academic Preparation for State Assessments

To help determine whether their academic preparation practices for state assessments are appropriate, school and district personnel may find it useful to answer the questions noted below. Those who can answer "yes" to all five questions are likely using academic preparation practices for state assessments that are consistent with the California *Education Code* and *California Code of Regulation, Title 5*, Section 854. However, schools and districts are expected to monitor their preparation practices to ensure that they are consistent with the California *Education Code* and *California Code of Regulations, Title 5*.



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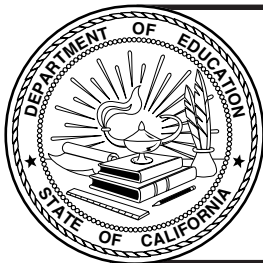
1. Are all students in my school/district being provided with a standards-based instructional program employing the instructional principles and practices set forth in the content-area frameworks?	Yes	No
2. Are the preparation materials and/or practices being provided to students meant to improve student learning rather than to achieve a score on a particular test?	Yes	No
3. Are students in my school/district being taught test-taking skills designed to assist them in taking any type of test rather than a particular state test?	Yes	No
4. Are the released test items and other materials used in academic preparation being embedded within our school's/district's standards-based instructional program?	Yes	No
5. Are the released test items and other materials used in academic preparation in my school/district included for the limited purpose of familiarizing students with the structure and format of the items and with strategies for taking multiple-choice tests?	Yes	No

Specific Guidelines on Using the Released Test Questions from the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) and the California Standards Tests (CSTs)

Released test items are now available from the prior year's test administrations of both the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) and the California Standards Tests (CSTs). In selecting test questions for release, three criteria were used: (1) the questions adequately covered a selection of the academic content standards assessed; (2) the questions demonstrated a range of difficulty; and (3) the questions presented a variety of ways standards can be assessed.

The academic preparation practices outlined below will facilitate the appropriate use of the released test questions. The suggestions also apply to materials produced by test-preparation companies as well as those prepared by individual teachers, schools, districts, and county offices of education. By limiting the academic preparation for state assessments to the types of practices described here, schools and districts can be reasonably assured that their preparation is consistent with the *California Education Code* and *California Code of Regulations, Title 5*.

Teachers may use materials provided by the California Department of Education and California's state test contractors as long as those materials are used for a limited purpose. It is permissible, for example, to use released state

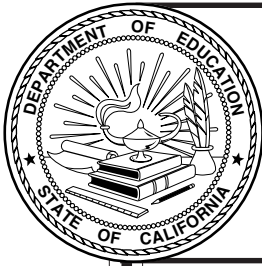


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test questions to familiarize students with the structure and format of multiple-choice questions and with strategies for answering such questions on state tests. Released questions should not be used, however, to develop practice tests that would mimic or parallel state tests, nor should they be used for teaching or drilling students only on the released items.

Appropriate Academic Preparation for State Multiple-Choice Assessments

- Teach standards-based curriculum using state-adopted or locally-adopted instructional materials.
- Use the practice tests that are provided by the test publisher as a part of the state testing program as prescribed in the manuals.
- Prepare students with test-taking strategies designed to improve their performance on tests included in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), or the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). This practice may, in fact, make the test more valid by reducing the influence of factors such as previous testing experience.
- Examples of appropriate test-taking strategies might include:
 - Using time efficiently
 - Understanding directions
 - Placing answers correctly on answer sheets
 - Checking answers
 - Using the problem-solving tactics of educated guessing, estimating, and working problems backward
- Exposing students to various test formats, including questions that contain “none of above,” “all of above,” “not here,” negative wording, and true-false statements
- Prepare students in ways that improve underlying achievement rather than test scores alone.
- Use released items to teach test-taking skills rather than to prepare items in the same format or to drill students on a narrow set of items. Examples of test-taking skills might include:
 - Analyzing released items to understand why standards are assessed in a particular way
 - Analyzing released items to distinguish between the correct and incorrect answers
 - Analyzing released items to help students determine what and how standards are assessed
- Use released items to guide the development of classroom tests. Appropriate use of items might include:
 - Analyzing whether classroom assessments address standards with the rigor that the state assessments do
 - Analyzing whether current classroom assessments adequately cover the academic content standards
 - Analyzing whether current classroom assessments present a variety of ways standards can be assessed
- Prepare students to take tests by focusing on curriculum and standards. Use the California Standards Test Blueprints to address standards to be assessed.



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Appropriate Academic Preparation for State Writing Assessments

- Have students write regularly in all content domains. The *Reading/Language Arts Framework* contains standards that describe writing strategies, applications, and conventions for these grade levels as well as teaching strategies for implementing the standards effectively.
- Have students write regularly in all genres that may be assessed on a particular test.
- Have students edit their own or others' writing for English language conventions.
- Share scoring rubrics and sample papers with students and help them use these materials to evaluate their own writing.
- Provide written directions for writing prompts throughout the school year and teach students to identify key words in them.
- Teach students to reread directions for written assignments and then read their responses to verify that they have fulfilled all requirements.